

WYCOMBE WANDERERS

by Tony Pullein

Wycombe Wanderers smashed all club records when they knocked Third Division Bournemouth out of the F.A. Cup in the last round. It was the first time since the war that they had knocked out a Football League club and now they are in the third round for the first time ever.

Wycombe initially held Bournemouth to a 0-0 home draw on their notoriously sloping Loakes Park pitch, then sprung a surprise by winning the replay 2-1 at Bournemouth. In the previous round they had eliminated Cheltenham Town from the Southern League.

The Wycombe team, which contains several men who were experienced England amateur internationals, is managed by Brian Lee, a former Port Vale defender whose playing career was cut short by injuries. He decided to take up coaching and now he combines his duties with the Wanderers with his other post as director of the Bisham Abbey Sports Centre.

Wycombe Wanderers were one of the most prominent clubs in Southern amateur football until amateurism was abolished and they are currently enjoying one of their most successful eras. Champions of the Isthmian League three times in the past four seasons, they are once again challenging for that honour.

Explains Mr. Lee: "It may sound strange but I place more importance on our League games than the Cup. The Cup makes an excellent diversion, but that's all it is. We can't be considered seriously to win it but it creates excitement and, of course, is a valuable help to our finances.

"Winning the League requires consistency and good football and we really want to come out on top again."

Formed in 1884, Wycombe Wanderers reached the F.A. Amateur Cup final on two occasions. In 1931 when it was played at Highbury they beat Hayes 1-0 to lift the trophy. In 1957 they met Bishop Auckland

before 90,000 spectators at Wembley. They were expected to lose and they did (3-1) because the Bishop's were then at the peak of their successes. That was their third consecutive win — a competition record.

Wycombe's home tie with Bournemouth attracted 7,400 spectators but they were hoping to double that figure for our visit last Saturday — the first occasion on which they had faced a First Division team in competition.

The fact that they held us to a draw, to earn tonight's replay, must rank as the finest performance in their long history. As preparation for the tie, they put in special extra evening training and had a dossier built up on our own play after having us watched.

Beams a proud Brian Lee: "We have some very good players who could easily step into professional football if they wanted to. Indeed, John Delaney — an experienced England international — took up an offer to turn professional with Bournemouth last season and was, in fact, in their team when we held them to a draw."

Mr. Lee explained that most of his players preferred to carry on with their own careers and treat football purely as an enjoyment.

One of Mr. Lee's problems in being involved in a run in the F.A. Cup is the availability of his players. "They all had to do a morning's work before we left for the evening replay at Bournemouth," he said. "Consequently, the day was almost a disaster. We were late leaving, late getting meals and we began the game so badly, conceding a goal in the ninth minute, that it looked like the end of the road.

"It says much for my team's fighting spirit that we fought back to win."

Brian Lee, then, is tremendously proud of his team. And he has every right to be. We extend a warm welcome to them this evening and, while hoping we manage to win in the end, we trust they will enjoy their visit.